# *The Direct Path into the Path*

## *Knowing Knowing in the Known*

In the past, as also now, I teach only dukkha and the cessation of dukkha.[1]

– *The Buddha, M 22*

[1] Pāli: ***dukkha***; suffering, stress, dissatisfaction, unease, distress.

## About This Treatise

This short treatise attempts to lead directly to entry into the Buddha's path. It is intended for those with a serious interest in the Buddha's practice, regardless of school or tradition. No prior knowledge is required; what matters, however, is a willingness to try to disprove what is said. Step by step, the text guides the reader through a direct investigation of their own experience with the aim of ultimately leading into the practice of knowing alertness, as practised by the Buddha himself:

'As formerly, Ānanda, so now too I often dwell in emptiness.'

– *The Buddha, M 121*

Without verifying for oneself, this practice remains inaccessible.

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'There are two conditions, bhikkhus, for the arising of right view. Which two? The voice of another and one's own wise investigation. These are the two conditions for the arising of right view.'

*– A 2.126*

# Foreword

‘Then this thought occurred to me: “Why, being myself subject to birth, do I seek what is also subject to birth? Why do I seek… what is also subject to aging? Why do I seek… what is also subject to sickness… to death… to sorrow… to defilement?

Suppose that, being myself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, I were to seek the unborn: Nibbāna, the supreme security from bondage? Suppose that I were to seek… the unaging… the unailing… the deathless… the sorrowless… the undefiled: Nibbāna, the supreme security from bondage?”’

– *The Buddha, M 26*

Motivation precedes all effort. Therefore, one should first carefully examine one’s own motivation. Do I seek what the Buddha sought? Those who can answer this question in the affirmative should consider the following: blind zeal does not lead directly to the goal – if it leads there at all. Followers of the Buddha need not discover awakening anew. They can and should rely on the awakening of the Awakened One. Purposeful practice begins with right understanding. May this text contribute to that by presenting one of many possible points of entry: whatever is experienced is known. What is the nature of knowing?

Andreas Baumann

## The Buddha's Claim

Ājita:

Bāvari asks you about the head and the shattering of the head.
Explain this too, Blessed One!
Dispel our doubt, O Seer!

The Blessed One:

Know this: not-knowing is the head.[2]
Knowing shatters the head –
knowing joined with faith,
alertness and undistractedness,
resolution and perseverance.[3]

*– Sn 1025–1026*

[2] Pāli: *avijjā*; not to know, ignorance, not-knowing. Concepts and views are taken to be true. The head: illusions.
[3] Pāli: *vijjā* – knowledge, understanding, as opposed to *avijjā*; *saddhā* – trust, confidence; *sati* – recollection, knowing alertness; *samādhi* – undistractedness, collectedness; *adhiṭṭhāna* – resolution, determination; *viriya* – perseverance.

Mogharāja:

Twice I asked you, Sakka,
but the Seer did not explain it to me.
I have now heard that only at the third request
does a godlike seer give an explanation.
Of this world and the other world, the Brahma-world and its host of gods,
I do not know your view, renowned Gotama.
So I have come to question the one of perfect vision:
How should one view the world so that the King of Death does not see one?

The Blessed One:

Having abandoned the view of a self,
ever mindful, Mogharāja, view this world as empty![4]
Thus one will overcome death.
Whoever views the world in this way,
the King of Death does not see.

*– Sn 1116–1117*

[4] 'The world' is one's own experience. Outside one's own experience, there is no other world – the assumption of other worlds is, in turn, one's own experience. What is experienced is its being-known. What is knowing like? Empty. Empty of what? This needs to be understood.

## The Path to Entry

'In what is presently known,
know that which is not swept away, not shaken –
this the knower should unfold.'

*– M 131*

This is how the Buddha described the practice of knowing alertness – but how could one practise without understanding what is not swept away, not shaken? And where, if not within me, could it be found? Let us explore this. Do not rush.

Who is the knower?
What is experienced is known. Of itself.
This is no theory – it is evident prior to any reflection.

Please examine the truth of this statement. Do you know that you know what you see? Do you know that you know what you hear, sense, smell, taste, think and feel? Do you experience anything that you do not know? How, then, would you know it?

Now, look closely and ask yourself whether the following assertion is true: What is known comes and goes, back and forth, up and down, near and far, inside and outside. Its being-known is always the same: whatever is experienced is always equally known.

Sensations, thoughts, ideas, images, moods and emotions come and go. Their being-known is always the same: whatever is experienced is always equally known.

Is this true? Sit down somewhere and observe the things that come and go – inside and outside. Are they all equally known? Or are there fluctuations in the being-known of things? Is being-known clear at one moment, and then unclear the next? Is it in motion at one moment, and still the next? Look closely. If there are no fluctuations in the being-known of things – what does that mean? Must it not, then, be detached from what is known?

Now, look closely: is there a knowing apart from the being-known that knows the being-known? If there were a separate knowing apart from the being-known of the known, a boundary between the known and its being-known would have to be visible. Search for it! Search for the boundary inside and outside, near and far, within thoughts and moods. Everywhere.

Have you seen a boundary? The beginning and end of the being-known? Can you see the known here and the being-known there? If that is not the case – what does that mean? Think about it.

Conclusion

So now, the known is its being-known: everything is known. At the same time, the being-known of the known is not the known, for what is known is in motion and fleeting, whereas its being-known is not. And yet, no boundary between the known and its being-known is to be seen. The known is its being-known.

What is the being-known of the known like?

Knowing is the being-known of what is known. Of itself. Look once more: does anything show itself to you that is not known of itself?

Now ask yourself: is the being-known of what is known an object that can be looked at?

If so, that would presuppose a second being-known apart from what is known that could look at the being-known. Yet you have seen for yourself that no boundary can be perceived between the known and its being-known. How, then, could knowing be an object that can be seen?

What follows from this?

What is *fundamentally* not an object of perception can be compared to an unborn child. Now ask yourself: can one imagine unbornness? Is that possible? Try it. Seriously. Really seriously! Keep trying until you are certain that it is impossible to imagine unbornness. Then, and only then, is it clear: unbornness transcends all attributions:

'I am', 'I am not'
'I am born', 'I will die'
'I am unborn', 'I will not die'
'I am the body', 'I am the mind'
'I am neither body nor mind'
'I am this one', 'I am that one'
'Knowing is empty', 'Knowing is not empty'

‘Knowing is born’, ‘Knowing is unborn’
‘Being’ and ‘non-being’
‘Becoming’ and ‘passing away’
‘Birth’ and ‘death’
‘Mortal’ and ‘immortal’
‘This world’ and ‘the beyond’
‘Good’ and ‘bad’
‘Pure’ and ‘impure’
‘Gain’ and ‘loss’
‘Healthy’ and ‘ill’
‘Beautiful’ and ‘ugly’

And so on and so forth. All of it: attributions, views, things known.

Everything experienced is known. Its being-known is empty of anything perceptible or imaginable. And yet, what is experienced now is its being-known. What does that mean? It can only mean:

Experience is the happening of emptiness; emptiness is nothing other than the present experience. There is no other emptiness beside it, behind it, or outside it, for all experience is known.

By now, the Buddha’s instruction should be intelligible:

‘*In* what is presently known,
know that which is not swept away, not shaken –
this the knower should unfold.’

*– M 131*

## An Overview of the Path

A man wished to visit the royal palace. As he approached, he saw two huge lions on the left and right of the gate and was badly frightened. A passerby noticed this and, moved by compassion, said to the man: 'Do not be afraid. The lions are made of stone.' When the man heard this, all his unease left him.

This story illustrates entry. In the man's experience, there was a before and an after: first not knowing, then knowing. Because of his not-knowing, he experienced his own illusion and everything that followed from it. Once he knew, he saw things as they are and was free from unease. The Buddha called this causal relationship Paṭiccasamuppāda: Dependent Origination. And he said:

'When this is, that is; when this is not, that is not.'[5]

More concretely:

When a view is taken to be true, the corresponding illusory world arises. When that view is not grasped, it does not arise.

For followers of the Buddha, this means that there are two phases of practice: the one before entry and the one after. It was no different for the Buddha – except that his practice was a journey into the unknown. He did not awaken through the guidance of others, but on his own.

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[5] See Ud 1.1

'There arose in me, bhikkhus, with regard to things unheard of before, the eye; knowledge arose, wisdom arose, true knowledge arose, light arose.'

*– S 56.11*

From then on the Buddha explained how not knowing and knowing affect one's experience, and he also showed how one can come to knowing: through understanding perception.

'Understanding perception, he is able to cross the flood.'

*– Sn 779*

In other places, he elaborated on this. For instance:

'Bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu does not understand, regarding the six bases for contact,[6] their origin and passing away, their gratification, their danger, and the escape as they really are, then he has not lived the holy life to completion; he is far away from this Dhamma and Discipline.'

When the Blessed One had said this, a bhikkhu approached the Blessed One and said: 'Venerable Sir, I am discouraged now, for I do not understand, regarding the six bases for contact, their origin and passing away, their gratification, their danger, and the escape as they really are.'

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[6] Pāli: *phassāyatana*; literally: contact base or sphere of contact; *phassa* = contact, touch; *āyatana* = base, sphere, basis.

The Blessed One replied: 'What do you think, bhikkhu? Do you regard the eye thus: "This is mine. This I am. This is my self"?' 'Certainly not, Venerable Sir.'

'Good, bhikkhu. When you see the eye with perfect wisdom as it really is: "This is not mine. This I am not. This is not my self," then that is the end of suffering.

The same applies to the other senses.'

*– S 35.71*

The Buddha thus taught: whoever does not understand contact 'is far away from this Dhamma and Discipline.' Let us recall the story of the lions. Anyone who does not know what they truly are can practise whatever they like in order to calm themselves down – it will not resolve the problem at its root. The same applies to the view of a self and its effects. Let us investigate this.

The six bases for contact refer to the body with all its functions: seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting and thinking. The basis for the body is what the Buddha called nutriment: this metabolism requires nutriment. Without nutriment – and this means not only food, but also light, air, water, movement, rest, sleep, and mental and emotional nutriment – it perishes. This gives rise to the organism's drive. The Buddha listed four kinds of nutriment:

'There are these four kinds of nutriment, bhikkhus, for the maintenance of beings that have already come to be and for the support of those that are coming to be. Which four? Physical

food, gross or subtle; contact as the second; mental volition as the third; consciousness as the fourth.'

*– S 12.11*

Now it is to be understood who or what that which knows is, or what it is like. In order to understand the Buddha's way of teaching,[7] one must bear in mind that the description of a thing is not the thing itself. The word 'fire', for example, is not fire itself. The explanation 'In truth, you are this or that' is likewise an empty view of a self and can no more lead to liberation than one can be burnt by the word 'fire'. One must discover for oneself who or what knows, or what knowing is like, and live from that realisation. It is not theories that liberate, but alertness grounded in knowing. Knowing is not its name or description. Why not? Because names and descriptions are things known. But who or what knows what is known?

What did the Buddha mean by contact?[8] What happens when two people shake hands? There is contact. With contact, a feeling lights up.[9] It is just like a light switch:

Contact → Light

Contact makes a certain feeling light up. This is known.

This principle applies to all senses. Wherever there is contact,

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[7] Pāli: *upāya*; means, way, approach, method, expedient, skilful means.
[8] Pāli: *phassa;* touch, contact
[9] Pāli: *vedanā*; feeling: visual feeling, auditory feeling, bodily feeling … mental feeling, that is, ideas, moods, emotions.

a certain feeling instantly lights up. Feeling, as we have seen, has two aspects: first, what is known – the content and quality of what is known: pleasant, neutral or unpleasant – and second, its being-known. Why this distinction? Because, as we have seen, the content caused by contact and its quality are always equally known. Now, with regard to the question of who I am, the following questions arise:

Is that which is felt – constantly changing and fleeting – the self? Is its continuous being-known the self?

These questions should be investigated with regard to all types of contact. How can this be done? By looking closely and asking oneself: Is what is seen known? Is what is heard known? Is what is felt known? ... Are thoughts, ideas, memories, concepts, teachings, philosophies, images, dreams, moods, and emotions known? In a word: is what is experienced known?

If one comes to the conclusion that everything experienced, without exception, is known of itself, the question arises:

Who, then, could the owner of knowing be?

The body? Is the body not also known? Who or what else could it be? Who could that be?

These questions lead to the realisation of what the 'material' of experience is and what it is empty of. The lions of experience have been recognised for what they are. From now on, the task is to stay with it.

Not-knowing and the resulting grasping of concepts and opinions lead to a whole range of habits and entanglements. This thicket can be more or less dense. For this reason, some understand what the Buddha is pointing to more quickly, while others require more time. Often, entry is preceded by a shorter or longer phase of practice, during which the aim is to arrive at a certain clarity of mind. A distraught mind cannot gain insight. This phase was described by the Buddha as follows:

'These two extremes, bhikkhus, should not be pursued by one who has gone forth: indulging in sensual pleasure and devoting oneself to self-mortification. Indulging in sensuality is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble and unbeneficial. Self-mortification is painful, ignoble and unbeneficial. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata has fully realized the middle way – which gives rise to vision, brings knowledge, and leads to peace, to immediate knowing, to full awakening and to Nibbāna.'

*– S 56.11*

After entry, that is, once the nature of experience has been recognised, knowing alertness is practised: knowing recollects itself within what is known.

When all habits of grasping have been overcome, the mind is empty of craving. It is stilled. This is what the Buddha called full awakening – by no means intellectual insights or transient experiences.

As a rule, detachment does not happen overnight, even though the Tipitaka records cases of people who were completely liberated on the spot after coming to understand the nature of experience.[10] Nothing is ruled out. The nature of knowing is recognised in an instant, yet it may take many years of practice before detachment sets in. Grasping at views and sensory impressions is a tenacious habit. Conditioning can run deep. The joy is all the greater when things begin to clear. Until then, one may have to cross a desert or two. The most straightforward way is to practise as continuously as possible.

Nanda:

There are, so people say, those who are stilled in the world.
How is this to be understood?
Is one called stilled because one possesses knowledge?
Is it one's way of life that makes one so?

The Blessed One:

Not because of views, learning or knowledge
do the wise call one here stilled.
Those who are nowhere bound, untroubled and without desire –
those who live in this way, I teach, are stilled.

*– Sn 1077–1078*

[10] Perhaps the best-known example is the story of Bāhiyo; Ud 1.10.

## Knowing Alertness

In the following verse from the Bhaddekaratta Sutta, said to have been composed by the Buddha himself, it is taught how to practise concretely: knowing recollects within what is known its being-known. One can practise while sitting, lying, standing or walking. The prerequisite is that one remains silent and engages in no other mental activity. Physical work does not stand in the way of practice. Over time, this way of seeing becomes second nature under all circumstances – what, after all, is not known?

Nevertheless, it is advisable to take as much time as possible to stabilise alertness in silence – ideally alone. No particular sitting posture needs to be adopted – it should suit one's own physical condition and be relaxed. Nor is there any need to strive for motionlessness. Natural, relaxed. Stillness comes of its own accord. Every now and then, you can go for a walk or have a lie-down. Or you can do it the other way round: walk most of the time and sit or lie down in between. More important than the outer form is freedom from distraction.

One more word on the contemplation of the breath, the contemplation of a word, a mantra, or any form of concentration. These are so-called supports. If practised with determination and perseverance, sooner or later they fall away of their own accord. Then the present stands completely naked in all its splendour. This experience can be overwhelming. One might even think that this is the unsurpassable enlightenment. That is not entry. Entry comes through understanding contact. That is not an experience.

## Bhaddekaratta – A Truly Blessed Day

Do not dwell on the past,
do not await the future.
For the past is gone,
the future has not yet come.

In what is presently known,
know that which is not swept away, not shaken –
this the knower should unfold.[11]

What is to be done today, practise with determination –
who knows whether death will come tomorrow?
There can be no bargaining with him,
with Death and his mighty army.

Whoever dwells thus tirelessly, day and night,
spends a truly blessed day.
So says the stilled sage.

– *The Buddha, M 131*

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[11] *Paccuppannañca yo dhammaṁ,*
*tattha tattha vipassati;*
*asaṁhīraṁ asaṅkuppaṁ,*
*taṁ vidvā manubrūhaye*.

The first two lines literally mean: 'And clearly sees the present phenomenon just there …'

*vidvā*: knowing, one who knows, one who has realised. Who is knowing? Who is 'the one who knows'? The heart? The liver? The left knee? The brain? In fact, practice takes place where there is grasping or non-grasping. This is not a locatable place, nor is it empty space, but effectuation.

## Commentary

‘Do not dwell on the past,
do not await the future.
For the past is gone,
the future has not yet come.’

Is concentration on ‘the now’ being taught here? Anyone thinking and practising like that chases after the now in vain, as their intention separates them from the present. What is meant here is exactly what is said: Realise that the past is gone. Realise that the future is not yet here. Anyone who has realised this understands what dwelling on the past and waiting for the future amounts to: dreaming. This means, then: Do not dream. In order not to dream there is no need for concentration. It is enough not to dream – to return to the present again and again. This practice can and should also be cultivated before entry.

‘In what is presently known,
know that which is not swept away, not shaken –
this the knower should unfold.’

This instruction answers the question as to how what is present now should be looked at. Whatever is experienced is known now. Wherever attention happens to be, know its being-known: in sensory impressions, sensations, arising thoughts and moods. Those who know, know without having to ponder: knowing is not the content of what is known, nor is it separate from or outside what is known, and it is empty of anything imaginable.

A word about difficult moments or periods. In normal times, it is not difficult simply to know sensory impressions and thoughts. But when overwhelmed by impatience, aversion, resistance, doubt, problems, dejection, or self-reproach, one might lose oneself in brooding or think: 'I do not want (or am not allowed) to have these thoughts and feelings! Surely knowing is detached and empty!' And then one begins to fight against them. This is how one ends up in a vicious circle.

At such times knowing with a support is recommended. The simple 'yes' has proven particularly effective. How is this 'yes' practised? Whenever a thought arises that wants to reinforce the unpleasant thought or feeling, or fight against it, it is instantly embraced with an unspoken 'yes' – with a 'yes' that is genuinely meant. In a flash. Over and over again.

Looking – 'yes'

When what is known is embraced with a 'yes', it is still known, but at the same time it is left as it is – it is neither rejected nor taken up, and knowing is detached. Thus, the 'yes' proves to be immediately liberating.

Compared with other supports, the 'yes' has many advantages. It is easy to remember and can be practised at any time; it does not fuel further brooding, it is not abstract or alien, and it does not look away. It lets what is known be what it is, seeks nothing, and is non-violent; it has heart, dissolves resistance, and is comforting. And it does not wear out, provided one does not practise mechanically.

## Practice in Daily Life

Thus have I heard.

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī, in Jeta's Grove, at Anāthapiṇḍika's bhikkhu residence. There he addressed the bhikkhus: 'I will speak to you about forest seclusion. Listen and consider carefully!'

'When a bhikkhu stays in forest seclusion and there his as-yet unestablished mindfulness does not become established, his uncollected mind does not become collected, his influxes[12] that have not yet ceased do not come to an end, and he does not attain the as-yet unattained supreme security from bondage; and when, moreover, the necessities of a bhikkhu's life – robes, almsfood, lodging, and medicine for times of illness – are hard to obtain, then he should clearly understand this and quickly leave that forest seclusion, whether by night or by day, and not remain there.

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[12] Pāli: *āsava* (sg.), *āsavā* (pl.); literally, roughly, "influx," "outflow," "inflow," or "leak." Four influxes are commonly enumerated:

*Kāmāsava*: the influx of sensual desire
*Bhavāsava*: the influx of the desire for continued existence
*Diṭṭhāsava*: the influx of views
*Avijjāsava*: the influx of not-knowing

The *āsavā* manifest as being caught, fettered, bound, and unfree. One is fettered and moved by attachments, fear of loss and death, opinions, and blindness to the true nature of experience.

Ultimately, all influxes go back to *avijjā*, to not-knowing – whether fundamental not-knowing or distraction in which one becomes absorbed in ideas, indulges in them, and loses oneself entirely in them.

When he stays in forest seclusion and there his as-yet unestablished mindfulness does not become established, his uncollected mind does not become collected, ... but the necessities of life come to him without difficulty, then he should consider that he did not become a bhikkhu in order to be provided for, and after some time he should leave that forest seclusion and not remain there.

When he stays in forest seclusion and there his as-yet unestablished mindfulness becomes established, his uncollected mind becomes collected, ... but the necessities of life come to him only sparingly, then he should think: "Here my as-yet unestablished mindfulness becomes established, my uncollected mind becomes collected, my influxes that have not yet ceased come to an end, and I attain the as-yet unattained supreme security from bondage. But the necessities of life come to me only sparingly. Yet I did not become a bhikkhu in order to be provided for." Then he should remain in that forest seclusion for some time and not leave immediately.

When he stays in forest seclusion and there his as-yet unestablished mindfulness becomes established, his uncollected mind becomes collected, his influxes that have not yet ceased come to an end, and he attains the as-yet unattained supreme security from bondage; and when the necessities of life come to him there without difficulty, then he should remain in that forest seclusion for the rest of his life and not leave.

When a bhikkhu maintains relations with a village, a market town, a city, a district, or a person, and there his as-yet unestablished mindfulness does not become established, his uncollected mind does not become collected, ... and the necessities of life come to him only sparingly, then he should consider this and, whether by

night or by day, quickly leave that person without taking his leave and not remain with them.

When, in such a relationship, his as-yet unestablished mindfulness does not become established, his uncollected mind does not become collected, ... but the necessities of life come to him without difficulty, then he should consider that he did not become a bhikkhu in order to be provided for, and after some time he should leave that person without taking his leave and not remain with them.

But when, in such a relationship, his as-yet unestablished mindfulness becomes established, his uncollected mind becomes collected, ... but the necessities of life come to him only sparingly, then he should consider that he did not become a bhikkhu in order to be provided for, and should remain with that person for some time and not leave immediately.

When, in such a relationship, his as-yet unestablished mindfulness becomes established, his uncollected mind becomes collected, his influxes that have not yet ceased come to an end, and he attains the as-yet unattained supreme security from bondage; and when the necessities of life come to him without difficulty, then he should remain with that person for the rest of his life, as long as he is not sent away.'

Thus spoke the Blessed One, and the bhikkhus received his words with joy and gratitude.

*– M 17*

## A Day on Your Own

Meditating for one or two hours a day and remaining alert the rest of the time is wonderful. But there are still many distractions. Anyone looking for a way to effortlessly deepen their practice would do well to regularly set aside days devoted to nothing but practice: to spend an entire day alone doing nothing but nothing. This single day is worth its weight in gold.

Better than a hundred years without virtue and seeing
is one day lived virtuously and seeing.

Better than a hundred years without wisdom and seeing
is one day lived wisely and seeing.

Better than a hundred years lived in laziness and weakness
is one day lived with strength and determination.

Better than a hundred years without seeing arising and passing
away is one day lived seeing arising and passing away.

Better than a hundred years without seeing the Deathless
is one day lived seeing the Deathless.

Better than a hundred years without seeing reality as it is
is one day lived seeing reality as it is.

*– Dhp 110–115*

## Seclusion from the World

Anyone who wants even fewer distractions should bear in mind that it is perfectly all right to distance oneself from the bustle of the world. One may ordain or not. One may withdraw to a place where one can remain free from distraction for a shorter or longer period. The world gets by perfectly well without me. Seclusion protects.

'One day the gardener brought the king various fruits and flowers. When the king saw them, he was greatly pleased, honoured the gardener and ordered him to prepare the garden, as he wished to visit it. The gardener did as he was told and informed the king that everything was ready. The king mounted his royal elephant and, surrounded by his retinue, made his way to the garden gate.

Near the gate stood two magnificent mango trees with bright green foliage. One bore no fruit; the other was laden with delicious mangoes. Since the king had not yet eaten any of the fruit, no one dared to pick one. As he rode past on his elephant, he reached for a mango and ate it. The moment the fruit touched the tip of his tongue, an almost heavenly flavour seemed to unfold. He thought to himself: 'When I return, I shall eat a few more.'

But as soon as it became known that the king had eaten the first fruit from the tree, everyone, from the viceroy down to the elephant-keepers, came and picked fruit and ate it. Those who found no fruit left broke off the branches with sticks and tore down the leaves, until the tree stood completely broken and ravaged. The other tree, however, remained untouched and still stood there, beautiful as a mountain of gems.

When the king came upon the two mango trees again on his way back, he saw that the fruit-bearing tree had been completely ravaged. He asked his ministers: 'How could this have happened?' They replied: 'The people saw that Your Majesty had been the first to eat its fruit. They then plundered it. The other tree, however, has lost neither a leaf nor its beauty.' The king asked: 'Why is that?' They replied: 'Because it bears no fruit.'

Deeply moved, the king thought to himself: 'This tree preserves its fresh green because it bears no fruit. Its neighbour, however, has been broken and ravaged because of its fruit. So it is with my kingship: it is like the fruit-bearing tree. The life of an ascetic, on the other hand, is like the barren tree. Those who have possessions live in fear; those without possessions have nothing to fear. I no longer wish to be like the fruit-bearing tree, but like the barren one. I shall leave all splendour behind, renounce the world and live as an ascetic.'

Having made this resolution, he returned to the city. At the gate of his palace he summoned the commander-in-chief and said: 'From this day on, no one shall see my face – except one servant who brings me food and another who brings me water for rinsing my mouth and a toothstick. You, together with my experienced judges, shall govern the kingdom. From now on I shall live as an ascetic on the roof of the palace.' Having said this, he went up alone to the roof of the palace and from then on lived there as an ascetic.'

*– Ja 539*

## The Result

Having found the way out of the labyrinth of views,
arrived at certainty, having found the path,
with knowing arisen, no longer in need of another's guidance –
wander alone like a rhinoceros.

*– Sn 55*

When knowing is free from doubt, it stands on its own. At this point, it has entered the second phase of the path. What follows is like the growth of a seed after it has been awakened: it grows and grows and grows. How much it grows depends only on perseverance and time. Nothing can be hastened – all one can do is remain true to the practice. Only what is experienced now can nourish its growth.

Only those who are free from doubt should withdraw into seclusion. It is not seclusion that liberates, but right understanding. When right understanding is awake, however, seclusion protects, leads to calm and clarity, and brings deep joy.

Delightful are the forests
where people find no delight.
Those free from passion delight there;
they do not seek sensual pleasures.

*– Dhp 99*

Unrelenting vigilance is the path to the Deathless,
heedlessness is the path to death.
The vigilant do not die;
the heedless are like the dead.

Having recognised this distinction,
the wise delight in unrelenting vigilance
and wander joyfully in the pasture of the Noble Ones.

– *Dhp 21–22*

Whatever is made into 'mine' through thinking is subject to loss and suffering. For example: if the beloved child of a distant acquaintance dies, it does not shake you so deeply. But if 'my' child dies, that is a profoundly different matter. So it is with everything that has been made into 'mine': my body, my mind, my health, my illness, my happiness, my misfortune, my reputation, my possessions, my success, my beliefs, my abilities, my family, my friends, and my life. Happiness and misfortune, joy and sorrow, approval and disregard, gain and loss, illness and dying are inevitable – but appropriation is not.

In the being-known of what is known, there is nothing that can be perceived or imagined. It is empty of anyone who is or has anything. Those who have realised this direct their attention towards this fact: whether in their fundamental attitude or in sensory impressions, sensations, arising thoughts, and moods. So there is no grasping. What is not grasped is unborn as 'mine'. What is unborn suffers no loss. An unborn child can neither lose anything nor die.

Empty of craving before dissolution,
not relying on what has passed,
in the midst of the now – ineffable[13] –
anticipating nothing.

Without anger, fear, or boasting,
free from remorse –
speaking with discernment, not conceited –
truly, his speech is restrained.

Without attachment to the future,
not grieving over the past,
knowing detachment in present contact,
he is no longer led astray by views.

*– Sn 849–851*

[13] Pāli: *nūpasaṅkheyyo*: not conceptually determinable, not to be captured in concepts, ungraspable, ineffable. Here, knowing knowing is described: knowing knows that it knows – at the same time, this awareness is ineffable. One could call it the 'deepest point of the mind' or 'home': knowing rests in itself.

Tissa Metteyya

Who lives at peace in this world?
Who is free from agitation?
Who, having clearly seen through both ends,
knowing, remains detached in the middle?
Whom do you call a great man?
Who has overcome the joining?

The Blessed One:

He who, amidst desirable sense objects, lives the pure life,
ever mindful and detached,
the monk who, through discernment, has found peace:
in him there is no more agitation.
Having clearly seen through both ends,
knowing, he remains detached in the middle.
Him I call a great man –
he has overcome the joining.

*– Sn 1040–1042*

The two ends: 'I' here, 'mine' there; 'I' here – the other, he, she or it, there. The middle: having understood the nature of knowing, when knowing knows in the supposed other its being-known, the supposed 'I' also falls away. The subject–object split thus does not arise. Such is direct knowing, empty of desire. This is the secret of knowing alertness.

## Conclusion

Once, when I was teaching German in a Thai wat, the highly respected abbot asked me: 'What do you tell your visitors is the most important thing on the path?' At that time, I was living in a hermitage in a nearby forest. I knew instantly what the abbot was getting at. However, since I had no clear idea at the time how to convey entry, I did not want to stick my neck out and replied: 'Morality.' The abbot merely nodded. When I asked him what he considered to be the most important thing, he said after some hesitation: 'Entry.' This immediately filled me with enthusiasm.

Ten years have passed since then, during which I have thought a great deal about how entry might be conveyed to a general readership. There are many paths within the different schools. What all these paths have in common is that they lead, or are intended to lead, to entry, though their approaches sometimes differ considerably. I have decided to start directly from what is evident: what is experienced is known. This is not a matter for debate. Either one takes note of it or one does not.

There is no need to proceed through extensive study of the teachings – it is enough to know what is to be investigated. Theoretical knowledge may even prove to be an obstacle. Teachings do not lead to entry – looking does. Once one has entered, one understands them in retrospect, for they put into words what has been realised through looking. That is why I have kept this brief. I do not wish to place obstacles in the reader's way. Those who seek more guidance will find it elsewhere.

## A Personal Note

My reflections on this message in a bottle began in Crete. I travelled to the island to reflect on my own dying. At the same time, there was still a vow I had made at the age of twenty-five and had yet to fulfil: to write a text on Zen that 'does not lead astray'.

And thus, slowly but surely, this message in a bottle came to be. It concerns the teaching of the Buddha – not a teaching I have concocted myself, nor one that I have copied or retold. It concerns a possible approach to the Buddha's realisation, one that I consider realistic. The difficulty lies less in recognising the obvious than in taking the hypothesis seriously and examining it.

'Buddha' means 'the awakened one'. The mind of this man, who lived so long ago, had recognised something. Anyone interested in the Buddha's teaching or in Buddhist practice should take note of this. The Buddha's teaching ultimately aims at the practice of knowing alertness.

In this message in a bottle, the image of the stone lions is used – they are either recognised for what they are, or they are not. The moment the man who feared the lions realised that they were made of stone, he awakened to the true nature of the lions. Such was the Buddha's awakening – with the sole difference that his lions were his entire experience: seeing, hearing … thinking, and knowing.

One might decide to practise something 'Buddhist' that one believes will help oneself or others. That is wonderful, as long as it

proves to be wholesome. The Buddha did not teach that one should not take good care of oneself and others alike. Nor did he teach one to pursue what is unwholesome. As he explicitly taught:

To refrain from all that is unwholesome,
To cultivate what is wholesome,
To purify one's own mind –
This is the teaching of the Buddhas.

– *Dhp 183*

Health is the foremost gain,
Contentment the foremost wealth,
A person one can trust is the best relative,
Nibbāna the foremost happiness.

– *Dhp 204*

There is much Buddhist wisdom that can be applied without taking an interest in the Buddha's awakening. There is nothing wrong with that. Yet anyone interested in the purification of the mind and in Nibbāna cannot avoid taking an interest in the Buddha's realisation as well.

When I was twenty, I was filled with a terrible dread of death. When I read somewhere that awakening liberates from the dread of death, I decided on the spot to dedicate this life to awakening. I said to myself, 'Before I have found this awakening, I will pursue nothing else in this life', without having the slightest idea what that meant. I was truly desperate and suffered from severe depression.

Forty years have passed since then. In pursuit of awakening, I left no stone unturned: study, mindfulness, meditation, discipline, non-discipline. Yet after twenty years, I had to admit to myself: 'You haven't budged a single millimetre.' The dilemma of birth and death was still unresolved. And so I asked myself: 'Why is that?' Suddenly I realised: 'Until now, you have always used your own thinking as the yardstick for judging teachings and teachers.' Then I understood my mistake. How could an ignorant person ever find knowing as long as they use their ignorance as the yardstick for their search? So I asked myself: 'Whom can you trust?' The answer was there instantly: 'The Buddha.' If I had not made this decision, you would not be holding this message in a bottle in your hands. And that is why I quote the Buddha, although, of course, I could have quoted many others too – not only Buddhists. Besides, the Buddha was not a Buddhist either.

In this message in a bottle, I have not gone into what does not need to be done. I have explained what should be done in as few words as possible. This also means that every question needs to be examined. One can and should rely on the Buddha's awakening. But that does not mean that one can dispense with looking and thinking for oneself. Insight is different from seeing and acting through the lens of what others have realised. What others have realised, they have realised – not I. Imitation and methods do not liberate from the view of a self – even when something good comes of them.

What must be realised for oneself is the nature of present experience. When realised, it is clear: everything experienced is known. Without exception. Entirely of itself. Inevitably. Crystal clear. At all times. Now. At the same time, being-known is empty of what is known. Why is that? Because being-known is not an other, and thus not an object of perception. Seeing sees everything, but not itself. What is not an object of perception is unborn as something or someone – and thus also as any conceivable 'I'. Unbornness eludes all imagination and all attribution. Cognition cannot cognise itself, although it ceaselessly cognises everything.

This can be known directly in the known, since the known is its being-known. When knowing knows in this way wherever attention happens to be, the known is simply known. Arising thoughts and reflections thus known are left to their natural dissolution.

This is the working principle of knowing alertness.

A concept that is not grasped causes no problem. A problem that is not created does not need to be solved. A burden that is not taken up does not need to be carried. Nor does it need to be cast off.

'Truly, when things reveal themselves
to the untiring, discerning sage,
he stands there, piercing the hosts of death,
like the sun that illumines the sky.'

*– Ud 1.3*

‘There is, monks, an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned. If, monks, there were no unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, no escape would be discerned from what is born, become, made, conditioned.

But since there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, monks, an escape is discerned from what is born, become, made, conditioned.’

– *Ud 8.3*

Here, the Buddha said: ‘There is an unborn.’[14] How could there be something unborn? What on earth could that be? Something outside one’s own experience? How, then, could it be the escape? Was the Buddha a windbag?

## Colophon

The sender of this message in a bottle does not come from an institution, is not within an institution, has no institution, and is no institution. His mentor is suffering.

[14] Pāli: *Atthi ajātaṃ.* There is, there is present, there exists the unborn.

## Abbreviations

A = Aṅguttara Nikāya
Dhp = Dhammapada
M = Majjhima Nikāya
Ja = Jātaka
S = Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sn = Sutta Nipāta
Ud = Udāna

## Pāli Canon Online

www.suttacentral.net

## Supplementary Literature on Knowing Alertness

There is a wealth of literature on knowing alertness, from all Buddhist schools as well as from non-Buddhist traditions. Since this treatise aims to be accessible to a general readership, the following collection of sayings by Ajahn Dune is recommended as supplementary reading, as it is free of jargon, matter-of-fact, and precise.

Gifts He Left Behind, The Dhamma Legacy of Phra Ajaan Dune Atulo; available online as a PDF.

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*The Direct Path into the Path*
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